

FF8 - Resolution

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Seifer walked through the vast expanse of spring blossoms, the entire field was fragrant with their perfume. Slightly behind him, Fujin followed. She'd insisted on coming with him. Seifer knew that, were he still alive, Raijin would have been here too. But Raijin was dead and gone for the past four years, victim of a misidentified fish. Seifer still didn't know whether to howl in agony at the loss or laugh at the absurdity of it all.

As he approached the old ruins, Seifer couldn't help but remember. Looking slightly west, he imagined his old command, Galbadia Garden, when he'd still been Edea's Knight. That was the battle when he'd finally realized just how outclassed he'd been. Squall, with little more than a bunch of kids and trainees, had totally wiped out his army.

Fujin looked at him with a morose expression. "DISTURBING." She didn't like to be reminded of that time any more than he did. Twenty-five years later, it still haunted them both. "LEAVE?" She asked, apparently rather hoping that Seifer would change his mind and they could return to their little apartment in Fisherman's Horizon.

Seifer shook his head, his expression one of grim determination. "No, it about time I did this." He gazed up into the sky, consumed by memories of lost opportunity. He'd been so stupid back then. He'd even ended up throwing away the most beautiful girl on the planet.

Seifer walked with false determination towards his old home, Fujin reluctantly following behind. The place looked so shabby now, he thought with some regret. It had been a great place to grow up. He could see his destination, a small tomb keeping watch just outside the battered old stone wall.

Fujin let him approach alone, she knew that this was something that Seifer had to do by himself. Seifer walked towards the tomb, feeling very much like an unwanted intruder.

It was rather small and plain, considering the importance of its inhabitant. Seifer was actually a little surprised at how ordinary it really was. The only decoration on the entire structure was a stylized animal of some kind. It seemed oddly appropriate a resting place, though, a fitting monument.

Now that he was here, Seifer was suddenly at a loss for words. He'd had so many prepared but now his mind was a blank. What could I possibly say to you, he wondered silently. Apologies were not things that came easily, not even after all this time.

"It's been a long time, Squall," Seifer murmured. "So many things I should have said when you were alive, when it counted. I guess it's too late now." He touched his hand to the cold stone, hoping that somehow his old nemesis could still hear him. Nemesis. If he hadn't been so jealous they might have even been friends, his life might have been so different. He might have become a Seed.

"It's never too late, Seifer Almasy," said a lyrical voice behind him. Startled by the voice, Seifer whirled around. Standing before him was exquisite perfection in the form of Rinoa Leonheart. He hazily wondered where on earth she'd come from then remembered how Edea had been able to move between places with utter ease. "My Seeds told me that you were coming here," she said by way of explanation. "I thought that we should talk."

"Rinoa," he whispered, trying to put a wealth of regrets into that single word. She was a thing of awesome beauty now. Time and experience had made her more lovely in her forties than she'd ever been as a teenager. She looked at ease with her power now, a power Seifer felt he was indirectly responsible for inflicting on her.

She smiled softly, her eyes shadowed by sadness. He knew how much his betrayal had hurt her, he could see it in her eyes. She stretched out her hand in the direction of her dead husband's tomb. "He forgave you a long time ago, Seifer."

Seifer grimaced. "I didn't," he stated flatly, his fists clenched. He was a traitor, bully and a torturer, he didn't deserve forgiveness. After everything that he'd done to the man, how could Squall have possibly been able to forgive him? After everything he'd put Rinoa through, could Squall have forgiven that? "I can't see how he could."

Rinoa's face was somber. She cocked her head to one side then shook her head, pityingly. "You never knew him, did you?" she asked in a coldly factual voice. Seifer tried to think back and realized that he didn't really know anything about Squall the man. He had never been interested enough to find out. All he'd been interested in were statistics, scores, test results, anything that could let him measure himself against his perceived rival. Shamefaced, Seifer remembered why he'd chosen to become a gunblade specialist in the first place: because that was what Squall had chosen. The desire to compete had long ago degenerated into a desire to humiliate.

Rinoa pinned him to the spot with her stare. "You both came from the same orphanage. You grew up together. Instead of turning to each other for support, you became enemies." No mercy showed in her face as she relentlessly drove home her point. Frustration gave her voice a harsh edge. "Two lonely, heartbroken young men who might have been friends and you wasted your opportunity because you were jealous of him."

She turned away, hugging herself. She was silent for a long time but Seifer couldn't think of anything to say to her. He couldn't deny what was true. "You never said goodbye," she accused. She turned to face him, her face vivid with a thousand emotions at once. "You never even saw our Thia, did you?"

Thia Leonheart. She was almost sixteen now. Despite everything, he had never been able to completely break away from the Garden. He'd kept track of what he could, hearing the gossip and reading the news reports. He had actually had the opportunity to see the girl once. It had been pure chance, during a vacation in Winhill. Even though he hadn't been introduced or even heard her name, there had been no mistaking who that kid was. She looked so much like Squall that it was scary, even down to the scowl on her face. Over the years, he had tried to follow as much of her life as her could. He'd been thrilled to hear that she'd graduated with a perfect score. Even more impressed when he found out that, like her father before her, she was a gunblade specialist. SeeD graduates, too young to know who he was, were quite eager to talk about the popular girl. She even had a fan club, largely composed of smitten young men, that closely followed her exploits. He'd even found out that she had a steady boyfriend, Zell's kid, of all people. He wasn't terribly impressed with her choice but he was glad that she'd found someone.

"No, I've seen her," Seifer said. "I've tried to keep up with what's going on in the Garden," he tried to explain. "As to why I never said goodbye, you must realize why that was." Back then, too many SeeDs knew what he looked like and too many of them had been out for blood. They blamed Seifer for that ugly battle between the Gardens, not Edea or even Ultemicia. He had been one of them and they had never forgiven his betrayal. It was that anger that had made keeping track of the Leonhearts so difficult. He had persevered though, because he had had a desperate need to watch over the girl, to look out for her like he should have looked out for his childhood playmates.

Rinoa sighed, her anger fading into regret. She nodded reluctantly, conceding to the truth of those times. "You were pretty much hated back then," she admitted. She looked up, remembering past events. "Some SeeDs wanted to hunt you down," she said still looking up at the clouds. "Squall told them to knock it off." She abruptly laughed, and looked at Seifer, smiling in amusement at the memory. "He made an official announcement with his usual tact." Her smile faded and she shook her head, remembering ugly reality. "Squall and the others would have tried to protect you but your presence, even in Balamb town, would have been pushing it. I guess good-byes were out of the question."

Seifer noticed the omission. Rinoa hadn't mentioned herself in the list of potential protectors. For someone who had wanted him to tell her goodbye, why wouldn't she want to be there to keep him alive? Despite a growing desire not to know the answer, he asked anyway.

There was some shame on Rinoa's face. "You have to understand, Seifer. It was very bad for me at the time." She hung her head, running one hand through her hair. "I had no control over my power. The angrier I was, the worse it became." She looked at him, her expression frank and honest. "I was really angry with you. Beyond angry." She let out a long stuttering sigh. There had been no guarantee that she wouldn't have lashed out at him in subconscious rage. The incident with Adel had given her nightmares for months afterwards. Long ugly nights, filled with fear and dread. "I might have killed you."

Rinoa's blunt admission was too much. Seifer desperately wanted this to be over so he wouldn't have to hear any more. Being here, in her presence, was suddenly almost more than he could stand. She hated him and he couldn't bear it. It didn't matter that she didn't actually come out and say it. How could she not hate him after what he'd done to her, to Squall, to everyone in the Garden? He didn't want to stay here and have her say the words. He'd hoped that apologizing to Squall would free him from guilt but he didn't think freedom was an option any longer. You could pretend that the dead forgave you, but he was here, confronting the living. The living hated him.

What could he possibly do to fix this? He had no idea at all of what to do. Once upon a time, Edea had called him a boy. He'd spent the last twenty-five years learning to become a man and he still wasn't sure if he was. He didn't know where to begin to make it right. Seifer suddenly paused. Yes he did, but he was still too proud to do it. Pride had always been his greatest enemy. Perhaps, at last, he was learning.

"I'm sorry, Rinoa."

The universe held its breath as she regarded him as expressionless as statue. She watched him in utter silence, neither blinking nor moving. The entire world seemed to stop and wait to see what the last sorceress in the world would do.

Silently she bent down and plucked a flower. She looked at it, her head cocked to one side, as though considering some unseen wisdom, some knowledge that the delicate blossom possessed.

Slowly, quietly she walked up to him and looked at him long and hard. Seifer waited quietly, tensed. He didn't mind if he died, so long as it was Rinoa that killed him. He could stand that. He was actually beginning to look forward to it. Life had become too painful, too burdened by guilt and regret. Perhaps death could redeem him.

She took his hand and, into his open palm, she dropped the flower. But it wasn't a flower anymore, a pale white feather lay there, utterly perfect. Seifer stared at it in wonder. Rinoa smiled kindly.

"I forgive you."

A kind of peace seemed to settle over her, she seemed somehow serene. A shimmering distortion appeared in the air beside Rinoa. "Goodbye, Seifer". She stepped into it and vanished, leaving Seifer alone.

Fujin walked up to him where he stood, frozen in the moment, her expression gentle. "ALRIGHT?" she asked him. It was just the two of them now. There was nothing in between anymore. The burden of his guilt was gone.

Seifer smiled, the first truly happy smile she'd seen on his face in twenty-five years. He wrapped his arm around her waist and gave her a sound kiss. "Yes, I am." He carefully put the feather into his shirt pocket, then nodded. "Lets go home."

FIN

Author's note: What can I say, I like Seifer. After I finished the game the first time I started wondering how things might have been for him afterwards. Did he change, how did he feel about what he did, what did SeeD think of him, that kind of thing. I decided to write about an older, wiser Seifer, one who might have learned to appreciate the depths of what he did. I wanted him to be able to hold his head up high once more.

End
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